



*Living Well*

*May is Better Sleep Month*

## TO SLEEP OR NOT TO SLEEP

*Poor sleep habits are among the most common problems encountered in our society. When sleep is reduced by as little as an hour and a half, it reduces the following day's alertness by one-third. Over time, excessive daytime sleepiness impairs memory, the ability to process information, and the ability to adequately function.*

### Good Night

Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to sleep well. Many factors contribute to sleep deprivation and most of them are within your control. If you toss and turn before you're able to fall asleep, or have awakenings that interrupt your rest cycle, consider these tips:

- Devise a pre-sleep ritual to transition yourself from the day's activities to the restfulness you need to achieve at bedtime. A ritual can be as short as 10 minutes as long as it helps you relax. Some people enjoy reading, journaling, meditating or taking a hot bath.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol, particularly in the hours before bedtime. Caffeine can stay in your system as long as 14 hours. Alcohol may initially sedate you, making it easier to fall asleep; however, it causes arousals that can last as long as two to three hours after the alcohol has been eliminated from your system while asleep.
- Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods four to six hours before bedtime.
- Refrain from strenuous exercise within the two hours before bedtime. However, moderate exercise prior to sleep is optimal.
- Set a consistent bedtime and waking time. The body adjusts to falling asleep at a certain time, but only if this is relatively fixed. Negative results can occur if sleep times drift - even on weekends. When your sleep cycle has a regular rhythm, you will feel better.
- Taking a nap is not necessarily a bad thing to do, provided that you sleep less than one hour and it occurs 6- 8 hours before bedtime.
- Control your sleep environment. Minimize noise, light, and temperature extremes with ear plugs, window blinds, or an electric blanket or air conditioner. Try to keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature — not too hot (above 75 degrees) or too cold (below 54 degrees).
- Evaluate if your bedding is a source of your problem, and make appropriate changes. Pet hair or dust allergies are very common, requiring special bedding and/or more thorough cleaning.
- Don't use the bedroom as an office or recreation room. Reserve the bed for sleep and sex.

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## Sandman Says

Most people wake up one or two times a night for various reasons. If you find that you cannot get back to sleep *within 15-20 minutes*, then do not remain in bed “trying” to sleep. Get out of bed and leave the bedroom.

- Don't expose yourself to bright light while you are awake. The light gives cues to your brain that it is time to wake up.
- Do not turn on the TV. The best transition to good sleep does not occur while watching television. In fact, it tends to keep people awake longer because television is engaging and stimulating. Also, subtle light is emitted from many screens.
- Do not perform challenging or engaging activity such as office work, housework, etc. Read, have a light snack, do some quiet activity, or take a bath. After twenty minutes, return to bed. You will find that you can generally get back to sleep.

## Rude Awakening

Aging plays a large role in sleep patterns. After the age of 40 we have many more nocturnal awakenings than in our younger years. These are compounded by other practices like drinking alcohol, smoking or eating a heavy meal close to bedtime. The more nighttime awakenings we have, the less likely we will feel refreshed and restored in the morning.

Additionally, medical conditions can upset sleep such as heartburn, hot flashes, arthritis, as well as mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and stress. Certain medications can also upset sleep. Speak with your doctor to help determine the problem and the best treatment.

## Silent Alarm

You should wake up feeling refreshed and alert, and you should generally not feel sleepy during the day. If this is not the case, it is very important to consider that you may have an unrecognized sleep disorder. Many sleep disorders go unrecognized for years, leading to unnecessary suffering, poor quality of life, accidents, and great expense. Long-term sleep deprivations from sleep disorders like apnea have recently been implicated in high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. Since it is clear how critical sound sleep is to your health and well-being, if you are not sleeping well, see your doctor or a sleep specialist.

For information or assistance with any family, health or personal problem, contact SYMMETRY at (414) 256-4800 or (800) 236-7905 for confidential assistance.



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